Free Will: A Comparative Study

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Robert Kane argues that "[t]he problem of free will arises in human history when…people are led to suspect that their actions might be determined or necessitated by factors unknown to them and beyond their control."[1] Historically, philosophers have worried about the existence of their own free will because they feel that other factors might be limiting their ability to act without necessity. They worry that there might exist factors that pose a potential threat to their perceived freedom of choice. This worry has led to a rich tradition within the Western philosophical community that continues to the present day. This tradition is diverse in nature, with questions ranging from the conflict between human free will and the cause and effect relationship that seems to describe most occurrences in the world to a fairly recent debate about the implications of quantum mechanics for actions that occur without necessity.

This thesis will be a work in comparative literature. Comparison is important because it allows the scholar to view the literature and the tradition in a vastly different way. It facilitates new discussion of otherwise worn topics. This thesis, it has uniquely added to the long history of scholarship on medieval Christian thought and analyzed the notion of free will in literature that appears to take its existence for granted. For the Buddhist tradition, this comparison allows for the topic of Buddhist free will to be considered in a new light. In general, comparison fosters new ways of thinking about topics that can eventually lead to breakthroughs in scholarly research.

During the late medieval and early modern periods, the debate and concern among Christian philosophies focused on the relationship between divine omniscience and human freedom. Philosophers saw a large conflict between their views concerning the nature of God and their own freedom of choice. This basic worry can be formulated in the following argument:

[1] Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

1. God is omniscient.

2. Omniscience entails knowledge of all worldly occurrences.

3. These worldly occurrences encompass past, present, and future actions.

4. Knowledge of future actions includes the knowledge of all of my future actions.

5. Being omniscient, God is infallible.

6. Thus, those things which God knows I will do in the future must occur as God knows they will.

7. Hence my actions are necessary.

8. Free will excludes the idea of necessary action.

9. Therefore, if God is omniscient, I necessarily have no free will.

Most Christian philosophers have felt compelled to disprove this argument. Rejecting the conclusion, they were forced to find a solution that included both individual freedom and the concept of divine knowledge. Philosophers from Augustine through Plantinga have attempted to do this, modifying the theories to fix the problems associated with those theories that came before.

Moving to the Buddhist tradition, the theories that I cite within this thesis are said to bear the closest resemblance to the original teachings of Sakyamuni. While I use secondary sources to explain the tradition, the sources are of a different nature than the primary sources that I use to discuss the Christian tradition. They are the works of modern philosophers who attempt to explain the Buddha's teachings rather than defend one aspect of them or another. In short, my goal in choosing the different texts was to focus on Sakyamuni's philosophy alone. Within the literature that I analyzed, there is a general acceptance that humans do have free will, but that

this free will exists within a causal network. This network is explained by the theory of Dependent Origination[2], which was realized by the Buddha upon attaining Enlightenment. In a few words, it states that the entire material world is connected through a web of causes and effects.[3] Dependent Origination governs the entirety of the physical world, including the lives of humans. As such, humans are determined by their past actions in a chain that goes back to the beginning of time.

The Theory of Dependent Origination raises the question of how exactly humans possess freedom. If all human actions are determined by prior events, then it does not seem possible for them to be freely chosen. The argument might take the following form:

1. The entire world is governed by the Theory of Dependent Origination.
2. This includes human action.
3. The Theory of Dependent Origination creates a fatalistic[4] connection between causes and effects.
4. If all human actions necessarily follow their causes, then no human action is free.
5. Thus, free will does not exist.

The Buddha's philosophy assumes that free will exists without much question or concern. This means that any discussion or analysis of this problem must be accomplished through the addition of Western concepts. This does not mean, though, that the discussion is not an interesting and insightful one. While the Buddha may not have sought answers to this particular tension, the

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[2] The phrase "Dependent Origination" is slightly outdated. However, I will follow the convention of my sources in continuing to use it. The phrase "conditioned coarising" is more accepted by modern scholars.

[3] G.C. Pande, "Causality in Buddhist Philosophy," in *A Companion to World Philosophies,* ed. Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe. Advisory Eds. Tu Weiming (Chinese) J.N. Mohanty (Indian) Ninian Smart (Buddhism) Manetta Stepaniants (Islam), (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1999), 371.

[4] Fatalism is the idea that there is nothing that can be done to alter the present circumstances because they are necessarily determined.

conflict still exists within Buddhist thought and scholarship on the topic should still be examined.

At the heart of the conflict between free will and determinism[5] is the idea of ethics. Both traditions affirm that moral responsibility correlates with the agent's freedom of choice. It seems impossible to assign the agent moral responsibility for an action over which she has no control over. Both traditions must therefore solve the free will issue in a way that allows for humans to take responsibility for their actions. Buddhism and Christianity both acknowledge the implications of this issue to ethics, and the discussion of free will is fueled by it. Both traditions assume that free will exists and work to adjust their other beliefs in order to account for morality.

Within the Western philosophical tradition, the problem of evil[6] perfectly describes the conflict between morality and omniscience. The philosopher William Rowe formulates it in the following way:

> 1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient, being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
> 2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
> 3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[7]

While not phrased in terms of free will, the Christian philosophers have consistently contended that the solution to the problem of evil must include free will. However, their theories redefine the topic to make it compatible with divine omniscience. By altering the traditional definitions

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[5] I use determinism to apply to both the tension between divine omniscience and free will and the tension between the Theory of Dependent Origination and free will.

[6] The Problem of Evil consists of the moral problem outlined by Rowe and the problem concerning the natural evil in the world. I focus on the moral problem throughout this thesis because of its relation to free will.

[7] William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" in *The Evidential Argument from Evil* ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.

of freedom and of divine omniscience, the philosophers bring the two opposing ideas together into fairly consistent theories.

Through their alterations of the term, theist philosophers absolve God from responsibility for human sins through their explanations of free will. By giving the agent free will, God transfers responsibility to the agent; she is the one who makes immoral decisions and performs immoral actions. Thus, the evil in the world is the agent's fault and not God's. The extent to which one relieves God from this responsibility determines whether or not one believes that the proponent of the problem of evil wins the argument.

The problem for the Buddhist tradition is slightly different.[8] The tradition does not have to reconcile a belief in an omniscient deity with human action. It does, however, have to explain how a system of morality can exist given the assumption that human responsibility depends on freedom. The problem might be formulated as follows:

1. The Theory of Dependent Origination exists.
2. The human agent must be free if she is responsible for her actions.
3. The Theory of Dependent Origination appears fatalistic.
4. Thus, the human agent is not free.
5. The agent is not responsible for her actions.

The Buddhist philosophy uses *karma* to explain the way an agent retains responsibility. The *karmic* theory uses probability to as a means to solving the tension. The agent's *karmic* past creates a set of probable outcomes, but the agent's free will ultimately makes the decision.[9]

[8] This difference is partially due to the fact that volition is not central to Buddhist philosophy. While acknowledged within traditional texts, it was not a main concern.

[9] David J. Kalupahana, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, foreword by Eliot Deutsch (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1975), 129.

Scholarship that compares Buddhism and Christianity is extensive. However, there is little, if any, that focuses specifically on the similarities between their treatments of free will. This thesis works to fill that void. With the continuing presence of the free will problem within Western thought, comparison with another tradition's ideas works to bring us closer to an understanding that solves the debate. Additionally, the topic of ethics has continually interested philosophers in both traditions. Scholars want to know how and why an agent is held accountable. This comparison facilitates discussion between philosophers on both sides, hopefully leading to a more encompassing solution.

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this thesis will be a comparison of Western and Eastern thought concerning free will. It will be done through an analysis of specific theories found within both the Christian and the Theravadin traditions. After a lengthy discussion of each tradition, I will use a modern theory of free will to compare the two theories. In addition to analyzing both the Buddhist and the Christian conceptions of free will, I will attempt to draw parallels between the treatments of the topic within both religions. While the scholarship discussed takes vastly different approaches to the tension found in both traditions, I shall argue that the solutions to tend to mirror each other.

Chapter 2: Medieval Philosophy: An Analysis

When understanding the ideas propounded by medieval Western philosophers, it is important to understand the basic assumptions they make concerning Christianity. This is especially important because these assumptions are not necessarily the same ones made by the non-educated laity. The typical Christian during the medieval period did not attempt to understand her own free will in relation to God's knowledge. Most likely, she would accept both doctrines without consideration of whether or not her beliefs were logically coherent. As in most religious traditions, there is often a discontinuity between what the theologians argue is the proper way of understanding the religious dogma and the everyday practice of it. Thus, the issues discussed in this thesis will not be issues that concerned the typical medieval person and should be understood solely from within this context. The theologian is charged with making logical sense of a religion in order to propagate it and in the face of challenges raised by those practitioners who take interest in its underlying assumptions. Without the theologian, these practitioners' questions would remain unanswered and the masses might become distrustful of their religious leaders.

Within the Western tradition, science and religion have been intimately connected in a way that they are not in other traditions. For that reason, the discussion of the assumptions of Western philosophers must incorporate the scientific developments occurring at the time of the lives of the philosophers. As Armstrong writes,

> In the past…some rationalists and mystics had gone out of their way to depart from a literal reading of the Bible…in favor of a deliberately symbolic

> interpretation. Now Protestants and Catholics had both begun to put their faith in an entirely literal understanding of scripture.[10]

In this quotation, Armstrong is referring to the period directly before the early modern period, the time we usually refer to as the medieval period. Both the Catholics and the Protestants were moving away from the acceptance of scientific advancements, like that put forth by Copernicus, on the basis that the advancements contradicted the messages of the Bible.[11] Armstrong argues that this literal interpretation "would make the traditional religious mythology vulnerable to the new science and would eventually make it impossible for many people to believe in God at all."[12]

Later during the early modern period, circa the 17th century, Western thinkers began moving away from a traditional, mystical understanding of religion and towards a more rational, empirical one. This change from a literal interpretation of the Bible was partially brought about by the philosophers of the time who began to view God and his existence as a fact like any other. They felt compelled to rethink many of their assumptions concerning the nature of God and to prove his existence rather than just accepting it. Their approach to religion was based on the assumption that reason and faith are compatible, which was advocated for during the medieval period by Duns Scotus who translated many ancient Greek texts and based his reasoning on the arguments of Plato and Aristotle.[13] His work became the starting point for many of the philosophers during the early modern period.

Given the desire to prove that God existed, these thinkers turned their attention towards proofs that were partially based on the empirical evidence that they found in the physical world,

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[10] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: the 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam,* (New York:Gramercy Books, 1993), 291.

[11] *Ibid,* 289-90.

[12] *Ibid,* 289-290.

[13] *Ibid,* 197-198.

as opposed to those before who attempted to exclude the physical world from the proof. According to Armstrong, these philosophers moved toward a more modern scientific model because they wanted to replicate the types of studies being done, and proofs being constructed, in the academic community surrounding them.[14] In other words, they were living in a time of great advancements in the realm of physical science; they sought to prove God's existence through the same accepted means. As Armstrong says, they "felt compelled to verify the objective reality of God, in the same way they proved other demonstrable phenomena."[15] Philosophers, Aquinas specifically, also began distinguishing between the human conception of the God and God himself,[16] this distinction allowed them to make claims about his divine characteristics, even as they also claimed that humans could not fully understand him. This allowed them to argue that God is all knowing while also arguing that humans cannot fully comprehend what this means. Above all, this new approach to religion was rational; philosophers were looking to explain God in a way that could be verified and understood through the new approach to scientific study.[17]

In their attempts to prove God's existence, these philosophers also had to prove the logical coherence of the totality of the characteristics that they ascribed to him. As Kenny states, "The coherence of the notion of God, as possessor of the traditional divine attributes, is a necessary…condition for God's existence."[18] The characteristics most investigated by philosophers included omniscience and omnipotence because they are predicates created solely to apply to the divine being; it is not possible to understand them through an application to the human condition. For these reasons, philosophers have consistently explored these topics in great detail and with relation to many other religious issues.

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[14] *Ibid,* 296.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid,* 205.
[17] *Ibid,* 306.
[18] Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5.

One of these religious conflicts is the apparent one associated with God's omniscience and human free action. For the philosophers, omniscience means that God is all-knowing, and included in this ability is the concept divine foreknowledge,[19] meaning that he knows all future events in addition to present and past ones. Given this assumption, philosophers then attempt to reconcile human freedom of will with God's perfect knowledge. They must explain how God can know all future human actions while also maintaining that humans act freely.

We can distinguish two ways to construe the relationship between free will and omniscience; incompatibilism and compatibilism. The incompatibilist position holds that "*an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent's power to perform the action and also in the agent's power to refrain from the action.*"[20] Proponents of this theory argue that free will and determinism are not compatible. The definition excludes the possibility that the agent's decisions are influenced by prior actions or thoughts, meaning that the agent is capable of choosing any of the possible outcomes in a given situation. The agent chooses 'spontaneously' which action she decides to take. This notion of freedom is not compatible with divine foreknowledge because it holds that the agent's actions are fully within her power at all times. This means that she is capable of performing or not performing any action at any given time. In contrast, divine foreknowledge, as stated above, means that God knows all events prior to their occurrence. If God foreknows all things, it becomes problematic to talk about humans acting freely, given the above definition of freedom, because his foreknowledge would occur prior to their actions. Also, the definition of omniscience prevents

[19] The adjective "divine" means that the foreknowledge possessed by God is all encompassing. He knows every event that will take place and every event of the past and present. In other words, his knowledge is not limited in the same way that human knowledge is.

[20] William Hasker. "Middle Knowledge, Foreknowledge, and the Openness of God" in *Philosophy and Faith: A Philosophy of Religion Reader*, ed. David Shatz, (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 2002), 55. Italics in original.

God from being wrong. This entails that humans could not act simply through their own agency because they must act according the knowledge that God has prior to their actions. To act in a way that proves God's knowledge incorrect is to prove him fallible, a characteristic that the philosophers are not willing to attribute to God. The human agent, it seems, is going to act in a way that affirms God's knowledge, meaning that she cannot act according to her own agency alone, if at all. Rowe formulates the argument as such:

> 1. God knows before we are born everything we will do.
> 2. If God knows before we are born everything we will do, then it is never in our power to do otherwise.
> 3. If it is never in our power to do otherwise, then there is no human freedom.
> 4. There is no human freedom.[21]

It appears that the philosopher sets out to combine two notions that are inherently contradictory. Many different philosophers have attempted to solve this problem in many different ways.

In order to more fully understand the problem at hand, a few things should be said about the assumptions that these philosophers make about free will and about its relation to divine omniscience. Firstly, their notion of free will depends on the compatibility of human free will and divine foreknowledge; if the two ideas are not compatible, then the philosophers have no coherent argument.[22] This is clear given the nature of the tension. If it is possible for God to have infallible foreknowledge and for humans to have free will, then the problem dissolves. Secondly, their idea of free will is semi-derived from the way in which they immediately perceived the world. Human actions appear to be the result of their own deliberations and decisions to act in conjunction with the influences which they take from the world around them. These notions about free will are encompassed by the modern free will theory called

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[21] William L.Rowe, "Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, and Human Freedom" in *Philosophy and Faith: A Philosophy of Religion Reader*, ed. David Shatz, (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 2001), 46-7.

[22] Kane, (2005).

compatibilism. Compatibilism holds that "*an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is true that the agent can perform the action if she decides to perform it and she can refrain from the action if she decides not to perform it.*"[23] This definition of freedom allows for factors outside of the agent to affect her actions and decisions as long as she retains the ability to perform those actions which she chooses to. Compatibilism allows the philosopher to argue that human free will is compatible with some form of determinism. The agent's decisions are regarded as free if she makes them without any coercion and without any prohibition to her actions. However, her actions are still influenced by things like society, prior actions, and many other things.

With regard to the tension being discussed, compatibilists maintain that God's absolute knowledge of the future is compatible with the human's ability to decide her future actions because she is not kept form doing that which she decides to do or not to do; her actions are simply influenced by the knowledge of God. The problem for the philosopher then becomes finding a theory that best explains how humans have free will given that God knows all of their future actions.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the assumptions that the philosophers make with regard to the nature of God and of their understanding of free will, it is possible to turn to their actual arguments. The discussion will begin with Augustine who wrote during the early part of the Common Era and ends with Alvin Plantinga who is a modern philosopher.

The discussion of the problem between divine foreknowledge and human free will begins with Augustine in his work, *On Free Choice of the Will*. In it, he asserts that human free will is compatible with God's omniscience because humans retain control over their will and because foreknowledge does not entail necessity. A person can still be free to perform a certain action

[23] Hasker, (2002), 55. Italics in original.

even if another knows that she will do so. To prove this, he provides a thought experiment. Augustine writes,

> Then suppose, for example, that you are going to be happy a year from now. That means that a year from now God is going to make you happy….And God knows today what he is going to do a year from now….Then the happiness that God gives you takes place by necessity and not by will. You could not help thinking that the only thing that is within our power is that which we do when we will it….Therefore, although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will by the will….Simply because God foreknows your future happiness…it does not follow that you will be happy against your will.[24]

Throughout this argument, Augustine is conversing in dialogue with his student Evodius. He tells his student to suppose that he would be happy one year from now and that God knows that he will be happy. God not only knows that he will be happy in one year's time but will bring it about that he is happy. God's knowledge does not mean that Evodius will not will to be happy. On the contrary, Evodius claims that at the time of the conversation he wills to be happy in one year. Augustine argues that this proves that Evodius' will is always within his control and that the things which he desires do not necessarily happen because they are in accordance with his will.[25] This thought experiment leaves much unanswered though. In order for Augustine to prove that God's omniscience and human free will are compatible in the way needed to avoid the problem arising between omniscience and free will, he needs to prove that divine omniscience, not human foreknowledge, does not entail necessary human action (or the necessity that the agent will for certain things). He thinks that he does this through discussion of divine foreknowledge in relation to human foreknowledge. As Augustine correctly asserts, person A's knowledge that person B will perform an action does not necessitate that person B perform the action. Person B performs the action of her own volition. Augustine wants to argue that divine

[24] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* translated by Thomas Williams, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 75-76.

[25] *Ibid.*

foreknowledge works in the same way. He states, "if your foreknowledge is consistent with his freedom in sinning, so that you foreknow what someone else is going to do by his own will, then God forces no one to sin, even though he foresees those who are going to sin by their own will". God's knowledge that humans will perform certain actions does not necessitate the performance of said actions.[26] Knowledge alone does not bring about another's actions.

However, there seems to be a difference between God's knowledge and human knowledge. The difference is that human knowledge is fallible. It is possible that person A believes that person B will perform an action, but person B may actually perform a different one. The fact that God is omniscient, though, prohibits him from making mistakes like the one described; as stated above, omniscience implies infallibility. Augustine assumes that God's knowledge is perfect; nothing can occur other than how he knows it will and nothing occurs that he does not know about. Thus, if God knows that person B *will* perform action C, the definition of omniscience appears to indicate that person B will not only perform the action but will perform it *necessarily*. Thus, Augustine's attempt to reconcile the problem does not succeed.

Boethius made the next large contribution to the problem of God's omniscience and human free will in his work *The Consolation of Philosophy.*[27] Boethius agreed with Augustine in his view that the problem is one of God's foreknowledge functioning differently than human knowledge. In fact, Boethius argues that humans cannot have foreknowledge in the way that God does. He states

> [T]he most excellent knowledge is that which by its own nature knows not only its own proper object but also the objects of all lower kinds of knowledge….The situation is much the same when human reason supposes that the divine intelligence beholds future events only as reason herself sees them. For you argue that if some things seem not to have certain and necessary outcomes, they cannot

[26] *Ibid,* 78.

[27] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Translated by Richard Green, (United States: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962).

> be foreknown as certainly about to happen…or, if we believe that there is such foreknowledge, that the outcome of all things is controlled by necessity.[28]

If God has this sort of knowledge, then humans do not have control over their future actions. The necessity of God's knowledge means that the things which he knows must necessarily occur or his knowledge would be incorrect, and thus not necessary. Given the all-encompassing scope of God's knowledge, if his knowledge is necessary, then all actions are pre-determined. To solve this problem, Boethius proposes the theory of a timeless god. This conception of God places him in a timeless realm where all worldly events are viewed by him in the same moment.[29] Timelessness is a difficult concept to understand. A timeless god would be one which was in no way affected by the passing of time. But, the concept has much larger implications than this. A timeless god is one which does not exist in time; he exists outside of it while retaining the ability to view events that occur within the realm governed by time. However, for this god all events appear to take place at the same moment; the past, present, and future; he does not view the events sequentially as humans do.

This conception of God eliminates arguments about his having foreknowledge in the traditional sense because there is no "future" for him. Boethius and other advocates for the theory of God's timelessness are careful to explain that the future still exists for humans. Thus, God still knows the future events of humanity, but he does not know them as such.[30] Boethius argues that this eliminates the necessity of God's foreknowledge because it is not knowledge that occurred *in the past*, implying that it is not already determined.

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[28] *Ibid.* (pp. 113-114).

[29] In order to explain Boethius' theory, it is necessary to describe the way in which God knows the events of the world. However, it is difficult to explain the way God knows things without using tensed language. For simplicity's sake, I will use tensed language with the assumption that the reader understands that God exists timelessly.

[30] Boethius, (1962), 116.

Aquinas furthers Boethius' theory. He agrees with Boethius that God exists outside of time and sees all of eternity simultaneously. He also argues that the future is still prevalent for humans. Aquinas attempts to further the theory of a timeless deity and to answer an objection that arose in the philosophical community concerning the necessity of the future despite the concern that God's knowledge is of an ever-changing present rather than of the future. To answer this objection, he separates God's knowledge into statements about his knowledge from statements about the things in themselves as they occur in the world. According to Aquinas, statements about God's knowledge of future contingents, future actions that have non-necessary outcomes, are necessary, but statements about the future contingents *themselves* are not.[31] Aquinas writes

> Although the supreme cause is necessary, the effect may be contingent by reason of the proximate contingent cause; just as the germination of a plant is contingent by reason of the proximate contingent cause, although the movement of the sun, which is the first cause is necessary.[32]

In this text, the "supreme necessary cause" is the knowledge of God. The "proximate contingent cause" is some event in the temporal world; in the context of free will it would be the human agent's willing the effect. This means that there is a difference between talking about the things that God knows and the things his knowledge concerns. Aquinas attempts to argue that God's knowledge is necessary because it is his knowledge, which is by its very nature necessary because it is infallible. However, the objects of his knowledge, human actions, exist within time and are not necessary because humans have free will. While this assertion might work to alleviate some of the tension between God's necessary knowledge, it is important to note that Aquinas also asserts that things are the way they are because God wills them. If things are as

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[31]Thomas Aquinas, "Question XIV: On God's Knowledge" *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas,* in ed. with translation by. Anton C. Pegis, (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), 154.
[32] *Ibid,* 153.

God wills them, then they are predetermined and cannot happen any other way. Thus, it appears that things are necessary, despite Aquinas' attempts to prove otherwise.

Kenny argues against Aquinas' position, stating that it is "theologically unimportant and inessential to the tradition of western theism."[33] Rather than leaving the argument at this, he quotes Arthur Prior's argument about the ability of a timeless deity to know events that take place within the realm of time. Prior argues that if God exists outside of time then he cannot have knowledge of temporal occurrences. A timeless god has no way of acknowledging when events have taken place and when they have not. He writes

> God could not…know that the 1960 final examinations at Manchester are now over. For this isn't something that he or anyone could know timelessly, because it just isn't true timelessly….that argument that what we know when we know that the 1960 final examinations are over can't be just a timeless relation between dates, because this isn't the thing we're pleased about when we're pleased the examinations are over.[34]

Prior relies on our intuitions about what we feel when we say that we know something as it exists within a temporal realm. To be happy that an event is over is not simply to know that it follows the preceding event. There is joy in knowing that the event has actually taken place. Prior claims that a timeless deity is not capable of knowing when events have taken place because the deity does not exist timelessly. The only thing that the timeless deity can know is that the end of the finals at Manchester comes after the students take them. Such a deity cannot know that the finals are over because it does not exist in a realm where such knowledge is possible.

God is attributed with knowledge of events yet to occur; this knowledge is none other than divine foreknowledge. To give another example, God has knowledge of when I was born, but he fails to know that this event has actually occurred already. Prior argues that Boethius' understanding of God as a timeless being prohibits him from knowing this second piece of

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[33] Kenny, (1979), 40.
[34] Anthony Prior as quoted in Kenny, (1979), 39.

information because only beings that exist within the realm of time are able to recognize that events have already taken place.[35] At best, the conception of a timeless god means that the god knows that I am a creature who will be born, experience certain things, and die. He can have no knowledge of what is yet to come in my life. This seems to contradict what is meant when Christians speak of divine omniscience. This contradiction effectively renders any conception of divine foreknowledge incomprehensible within the timeless deity model.

Aquinas formulates his argument as a response to the argument that a timeless god's knowledge is still necessary; this was an objection to Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Aquinas argues that God's knowledge is necessary, insofar as it is his knowledge. However, the future contingents in question are not necessary because they exist within the material world and do not necessarily follow from their causes. This does not mean, though, that the ultimate cause, God's knowledge, is not necessary. Boethius takes a different approach to answering this problem. He distinguishes two different types of necessity. The first is a simple kind of necessity as in the statement, "all men are mortals". The second kind of necessity "is conditional, as is the case when, if you know that someone is walking, he must necessarily be walking."[36] Boethius argues that the second kind of necessity is conditional upon some outside force and is not dependent on the nature of the object in question. As he argues, "No necessity forces the man who is voluntarily walking to move forward; but as long as he is walking, he is necessarily moving forward."[37] In the same way, God's knowledge of things is necessary, but the things do not have necessity in their inherent nature.[38]

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[35] This argument applies just as well to Aquinas' formulation of a timeless conception of God.
[36] Boethius, *(*1962), 117.
[37] *Ibid,* p. 118.
[38] *Ibid.*

The question of whether or not this argument works is an important one. If God's knowledge can be separated from the things about which he has knowledge, then the timeless god theory solves the problem of free will and omniscience. However, it is not at all clear that the philosopher is able to separate divine knowledge in this way. Omniscience still seems to imply that if God knows that something will occur, then it necessarily occurs. Thus, the relations between objects and actions in the realm of time are necessary because God knows that they will occur. Unless the definition of omniscience is altered to allow for Aquinas' distinction, the theory of timelessness does not work.

A third attempt at solving this problem was put forth by Ockham in his work *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents.*[39] His approach to the problem distinguishes sentences solely about the future from those that appear to be about the future but are actually about the past. He uses philosophical analysis of language to justify his understanding of God's foreknowledge. Ockham bases his solution on Aristotle's theory of human knowledge. According to Aristotle, one can only have knowledge of true propositions. Aristotle's argument is laid out in his "Chapter Nine" *of De Interpretatione*.[40] Here he argues that propositions about the past and present are necessary; their truth values are fixed. Future propositions concerning particulars are contingent, not necessary. Thus, particular propositions about the future have the possibility of occurring or not occurring. The truth value of propositions about the past and present are fixed because the nature of the past and present are fixed. Statements about the future are not fixed in this way because future events are not determined; there is still the possibility that the events may or may not occur. This

[39] William Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents, t*ranslated by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzman, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, 1983).

[40] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione,* translated with notes and glossary by J.L. Ackrill, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

understanding of the future assumes that free will is a human characteristic that affects the outcome of situations. Aristotle proves this point using his famous thought experiment involving a sea battle. He argues that the statement "It is necessary that a sea battle will or will not occur tomorrow" is true. However, it is not true to say that "It is necessary that a sea battle will occur tomorrow" or that "It is necessary that a sea battle will not occur tomorrow."[41] The above argument is based on the following reasoning. Given any situation, there are at least two possible outcomes—either outcome A will occur or outcome A will not occur. This means that a statement about the necessity of the future contingent proposition is true only when the two outcomes are written as a disjunction—A either will or will not happen. It is impossible to prove the truth of either disjunct because future events are governed by free, contingent actions. In other words, a person can know that her friend will or will not attend classes, but until her friend arrives at class she has no way of knowing which of these two possibilities will occur.

Ockham uses Aristotle's distinction between two types of necessity to prove that propositions about the future are only known contingently. If the above thought experiment holds, then it appears that propositions solely about the future are also contingent. Ockham argues that statements concerning predestination and reprobation appear to be about the past but are actually about the future. In Assumption Two he argues that, "All propositions having to do with predestination and reprobation are contingent whether they are of present tense…or of past tense, or of future tense."[42] He then goes on to argue in Assumptions Three and Four that some propositions appear to be about the present, but these propositions are actually contingent upon

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[41] The expression pv-p is true while the expressions p and –p are not individually true. Using this argument, Aristotle believes that he has disproved the principle of bivalence while affirming the law of excluded middle (Richard Sorabji, "Tomorrow's Sea Battle: an argument from past truth (Int. 9)"in *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 94.)

Ockham, (1983), 45.

the future.[43] He states that "All propositions having to do with predestination and reprobation, whether they are verbally about the present or about the past, are nevertheless equivalently about the future, since their truth depends on the truth of propositions formally about the future"[44]. Statements of this kind are contingent because they are not true until their actualization. Ockham argues that God "knows future contingents" but "it must be held that He does so, but contingently.[45] In other words, Ockham wants to maintain that God has foreknowledge but that it is contingent upon human free will.

Ockham writes that God cannot have determinant knowledge of future contingents because their truth of falsity is not determined. In Assumption Five he argues that "From the Philosopher's[46] point of view God does not know one part of a contradiction [to be true] any more than [He knows] the other,"[47] this statement refers to future contingents. Recalling his argument from Assumption Four, it is obvious that God only knows future events contingently. If this were not the case, predestination and reprobation would be real qualities inhering in individuals. Ockham writes

> I take someone-A-who is now predestinate, and I ask whether or not A can commit the sin of final impenitence. If he cannot, then necessarily he will be saved, which is absurd. If he can…then I ask whether or not the real relation of predestination has been destroyed….if it has not…then it remains in A when A is reprobate. Consequently, A will be at one and the same time both reprobate and predestinate.[48]

Having both predestination and reprobation as inherent characteristics of one agent is absurd. The agent would be both saved and damned at the same time. If, however, the relations are not inherent within a person, that is, they depend on future human action, then God's knowledge is

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[43] *Ibid,* 46-47.
[44] *Ibid,* 47.
[45] *Ibid,* 50.
[46] The Philosopher here is Aristotle. Ockham is refereeing to the argument that Aristotle makes concerning the future sea battle.
[47] Ockham, (1983), 47.
[48] *Ibid,* 35.

dependent upon future human actions. Thus, more generally, Ockham argues that God's knowledge is, at least partially, dependent upon human free actions. Damnation and salvation are withheld until such time when all free human actions are completed.

Adams and Kretzmann argue that Ockham's formulation of God's knowledge of future contingents and of the fact that predestination and reprobation are dependent upon future actions is incoherent. They claim that this incompatibility is based on Aristotle's rendering of the contingency of future actions.[49] Ockham argues that the truth value of future acts is to be determined at some time later in time. As Adams and Kretzmann say, "[I]f neither the past truth nor God's past foreknowledge falls under the necessity of the past, the Aristotelian argument that His determinate knowledge of them would destroy the efficacy of human deliberation and choice, fails".[50] Here Adams and Kretzmann affirm that Ockham saves his theory from the fatalistic conclusion that human actions are determined by the foreknowledge of God and thus not within the agent's control by arguing that the truth of statements concerning the future has yet to be determined.

Molina, writing during the 16th century, takes Ockham's argument concerning the truth value of future contingents and expand on it to encompass an explanation of how God has foreknowledge at all. His solution to the conflict between divine omniscience and human free will has been referred to as middle knowledge. Kane argues that

> Molina begins by distinguishing three types of knowledge that God would have. Te first is God's knowledge of all that is *necessary* or *possible*. Being omniscient, God would know everything that *must* be and also every possibility—everything that *might* be. In addition…God would know, among *contingent* things…which of them *actually* existed…between these two types of divine knowledge…there is another.[51]

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[49] I*bid,* 3.
[50] I*bid,* 11.
[51] Kane, (2005), 157.

This in between knowledge is that which Molina referred to as middle knowledge, and it is this knowledge which he thinks solves Ockham's problem. Hasker defines middle knowledge in a very succinct way:

> for each possible free creature that might exist, and for each possible situation in which such a creature might make a free choice, there is a truth, known to God prior to and independent of any decision on God's part, concerning what definite choice that creature would freely make if place in that situation.[52]

God's knowledge includes the truth concerning all possible human actions. In other words, his knowledge is not limited to those actions that take place within the material world; it also includes those actions that could take place and do not. This definition means that God's knowledge is independent of human actions. Hasker writes,

> God knows the truth of this *whether or not* A ever actually *is* placed in Circumstances C; indeed, God knows this whether or not A even exists, so that his knowledge about this is entirely independent of any of *God's own decisions* about creation and providence.[53]

Middle knowledge relies on the existence of possibilities that have not actually occurred. Thus, there are two outcomes in any situation; middle knowledge assumes that it is possible for God to know both of these potential outcomes. By stating that God's knowledge is independent of the world he created, Molina frees himself from the problem of God's knowledge being determined by the free agents in the actual world. This solves the problem that Ockham faced—omniscience that is determined by the free agents that God created. It allows Molina to claim that God knows the outcome of any situation despite the fact that the human agent is free in his decisions. As Hasker states, God, in choosing to create [free agents] and place them in those situations, knew exactly what their responses would be."[54] As Hasker argues, God retains omniscience because he knows how humans will react to any given situation, but humans retain free will because they

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[52] William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 20.
[53] *Ibid* (pp. 20-21). Italics in original.
[54] *Ibid,* 21.

freely choose their actions within the circumstances. God does not foresee the future as events occur; he knows the truth concerning the outcome of the events prior to the creation of free agents. God also knows the outcome of all possible situations because he knows exactly which circumstances and individuals he created.[55]

Hasker presents a few challenges to Molina's theory. One of these questions whether or not the counterfactuals actually exist. As Hasker phrases it, "[t]he chief difficulty that the proponent of middle knowledge must confront is the contention that the truths God is alleged to know… 'counterfactuals of freedom,' do not exist to be known."[56] The traditional response to this challenge offers examples from the Christian Bible. Specifically, the Bible speaks of God's prophecies which take the following form:

> if his followers perform action X then some terrible consequence will occur, if they do not perform action X then destruction will not come.

As Hasker points out, these examples are not very strong because the prophecies are delivered by beings or things that can only provide yes or no answers. This means that the prophecies do not take into account all possible circumstances; namely, they do not take into account circumstances that have multiple factors. They also have a fifty percent chance of succeeding, making their credibility circumspect.[57]

The theory of middle knowledge has recently been revisited by the philosopher Alvin Plantinga. He has modernized the theory, combining it with possible worlds semantics. Plantinga uses the theory to prove that the argument he calls 'The Free Will Defence'[58] is coherent and credible. He gives this basic formulation of the Free Will Defence "A world

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[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid,* 22.
[57] *Ibid,* 23.
[58] Within the text that I cite, Plantinga misspells the word defense. I follow his example.

containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free…is more valuable…than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but he cannot *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if he does so…they do not do what is right *freely.*"[59] Plantinga concludes that God must create the possibility for moral evil if the creatures that he creates are free in any significant way.[60] Plantinga makes this very clear when he states, "The heart of the Free Will Defence is the claim that it is *possible* that God could not have created a universe containing moral good…without creating one containing moral evil."[61] Given this rendering of the Free Will Defence, the question becomes whether or not God could have created a world with moral good which also lacks moral evil.

Plantinga answers this question by eliminating the worlds which God could not have created. Among them, he argues, are worlds in which God alters necessary facts. He writes, "Necessary states of affairs do not owe their actuality to the creative activity of God."[62] Thus, God is only responsible for contingent states of affairs. Plantinga also argues that God does not have the power to change the past. Thus, "he can no longer actualize" states of affairs that have already taken place.[63] This assumption is also made by philosophers like Ockham who argue that only statements about the future are contingent.

The third condition that Plantinga places on the worlds that God could have brought into existence is that he can only create those in which he exists. At this point, Plantinga reformulates the question that he is trying to answer as, "If God is omnipotent, then he could

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[59] Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense", in *God and the Problem of Evil* ed. William L. Rowe, (Maiden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 93. Italics in original.

[60] Plantinga assumes an incompatibilist account of free will. Free will is not compatible with any sort of determinism, including God's foreknowledge.

[61] Plantinga, (2001), 94.

[62] *Ibid,* 96.

[63] *Ibid*.

have actualized just any world that includes his existence?"[64] Plantinga responds to the question by stating that God can only actualize a given state of affairs S only if he can cause S. But, he can only actualize a world W if he can actualize every state of affairs S that W includes. God could not actualize a world W if that world did not contain his existence because then he could not be the creator of that world. If he creates a world, then he must exist with respect to that world. Furthermore, God cannot cause the states of affairs that bring about a free agent's decisions. To actualize the states of affairs that cause free actions would be to cause the free actions, making them not free. Thus

> there are any number of possible worlds that God could not have actualized, even though they include his existence: all those containing a state of affairs consisting in some creature's freely taking or refraining from some action.[65]

This means that God could not have actualized a world containing moral good because such a world depends on the existence of free agents.[66] In this sense of actualize, God would be creating states of affairs that caused the agent's decisions, which he cannot do. This seems contrary to Plantinga's main argument; he further explains it by differentiating between a narrow and a broad sense of actualize. In the narrow sense of the word, God cannot create a world filled with free creatures and actualize the states of affairs that cause their actions because actualize here means to cause in the most direct sense. In the broad sense, God "can cause it to be the case that I freely refrain from *A*. Even so, he *can* cause me to be free with respect to *A,* and to be in some set *S* of circumstances including appropriate laws and antecedent conditions."[67] Here Plantinga grants that there are some worlds that God can actualize which include free beings—if this argument against the Free Will Defence is correct. The things that he actualizes are not the

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[64] *Ibid*, 97.
[65] *Ibid*, 98.
[66] I*bid,* 97-98.
[67] *Ibid*, 98. Italics in original.

exact state of affairs that cause their actions but rather the background circumstances that cause their actions; these laws include the laws of nature.

In order to continue exploring whether God could have actualized any possible world that includes his existence, Plantinga introduces an example involving a character named Curly. In the example, Curley is a mayor who is offered a $35,000 bribe and accepts it. The briber in the example then wonders whether or not Curley could have been paid off for $20,000. Plantinga introduces this example as a set of counterfactuals:

(7) If Curley had been offered $20,000, he would have accepted the bribe or

(8) If Curley had been offered $20,000, he would have rejected the bribe.[68]

Plantinga then criticizes a common way of understanding possible world semantics. This idea states that counterfactuals can be verified if in that possible world the consequent of the counterfactual is true. He argues that this has interesting consequences. Namely, denying the antecedent might lead to the same conclusion as affirming the antecedent, or the antecedent is changed in such a way that the laws of nature must be broken in order for the consequent to obtain.[69] After this argument and another along similar lines, Plantinga reformulates the question again stating, "Our question is really whether there is something Curley would have done had this state of affairs been actual."[70] He responds to this question by stating that there is an answer but that he does not know what that answer is.

At this point, Plantinga has still not soundly proven that humans are such that allowing them free will creates both moral good and moral evil. Plantinga attempts to prove this through the introduction of 'transworld depravity'. He defines the term in the following way:

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[68] *Ibid*, 100.
[69] *Ibid*, 100-104.
[70] I*bid*, 105.

> A person *P suffers from transworld depravity* if and only if for every world *W* such that *P* is significantly free in *W* and *P* does only what is right in *W*, there is a state of affairs *T* and an action *A* such that
>
> (1) God strongly actualizes *T* in *W* and *W* includes every state of affairs God strongly actualizes in *W*,
>
> (2) *A* is morally significant for *P* in *W*,
>
> and
>
> (3) If God had strongly actualized *T*, *P* would have gone wrong with respect to *A*.[71]

This means that there is no world in which God could actualize those who suffer from transworld depravity and thus create a world in which there is no moral evil. Plantinga then states that it is possible that every individual suffers from transworld depravity.[72]

Plantinga takes this argument and applies it to the original problem of the Free Will Defence. Recalling the original formulation of the problem, we see that the statements "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good" is compatible with "There is evil in the world"[73] if we assume that all creatures suffer from transworld depravity.

Plantinga's argument is problematic because he states that it is *possible* for individuals to suffer from transworld depravity and concludes from this that the Free Will Defence is necessarily victorious. His conclusion states that God could not actualize a world in which only moral good existed if individuals suffered from transworld depravity. This statement is not by itself problematic. He argues, that "it is possible that every essence suffers from transworld depravity; so it is possible that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil."[74] He uses 'essences' to combat the possible argument that God could have created

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[71] *Ibid*, 112. Italics in original.
[72] *Ibid*, 114.
[73] *Ibid*, 92.
[74] *Ibid*, 114.

other people to inhabit the world without moral evil; he could have created a set of people who did not suffer from transworld depravity.[75] As he states,

> An essence *simpliciter* is a property *P* such that there is a world *W* in which there exists an object *x* that has *P* essentially and is such that there is no world *W** is there an object that has *P* and is distinct from *x*.[76]

Plantinga makes it the case that the world which God can actualize must contain agents with a certain characteristic. He tries to make it the case that God had to create a world containing transworldly depraved essences. However, doing so does not actually solve the problem. He assumes that God had to actualize the exact essences that he did create and that these essences suffer from transworld depravity. Even if God had to create these exact essences that does not guarantee that these essences necessarily suffer from transworld depravity. Plantinga must do more work to get this stronger conclusion.

In addition, Plantinga ultimately uses this possibility of transworld depravity to conclude that the existence of evil is compatible with the omnipotence, omniscience, and absolute goodness of God. He formulates the conclusion as

> [1] Every essence suffers form transworld depravity…
>
> [2] God actualizes a world containing moral good…
>
> [3] There is evil.[77]

However, in his formulation of this conclusion, he relies on the assertion that the world that God can create is characterized as one containing essences that necessarily suffer from transworld depravity. In doing this, he begs the question. His argument takes the following form:

> 1. It is possible that the creatures of this world suffer from transworld depravity.

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[75] *Ibid,* 112.
[76] *Ibid.* Italics in original.
[77] *Ibid*, 115.

2. If this is the case, then God could not have created a world containing moral good but not moral evil.

3. Let us assume that transworld depravity is a necessary characteristic of the creatures that God created.

4. Thus, God could not have created a world different from the one that he did.

Plantinga assumes his conclusion in order to prove that it is true, resulting in a logical fallacy. Furthermore, he avoids any attempt to prove that the beings that God did create suffer from this characteristic. Perhaps it is not possible to prove this, but he does not have the ability to assert that the Free Will Defence is necessarily correct. The best he can argue is that the Free Will Defence is possibly true given the truthfulness of the assumption that human beings are characterized by transworld depravity.

Chapter 3: Theravadin Buddhism: An Analysis

As in the case of the Christian theory, it should be noted, that there might be a difference between Theravadin Buddhist doctrine its every day practice. However, there is a slight difference between the ways in which the two traditions are approached in this thesis. The Buddhist tradition that is discussed is that which modern scholars attribute to Sakyamuni Buddha as his original teaching. Thus, it is more likely that the theology being discussed corresponds to that which the practitioners actually did and thought in their everyday religious life. Conversely, the Christian discussion focuses on the philosophical tradition exclusively. This correspondence is not to be accepted as fact though; the distinction between theology and practice should still be considered for the Buddhist tradition as well.

A comment should also be made about the type of sources being used to discuss Buddhism. In the section on medieval Christianity, I analyzed primary sources. Here, however, I will be using secondary sources that both comment on and quote primary sources. This is partially due to the fact that the primary sources being used by other scholars are attributed to Sakyamuni Buddha. This attribution is opposed to a situation in which we know exactly who wrote the texts. I follow the scholars' example in also attributing these works to him. Also, the writing within this tradition is such that scholars comment on and expound upon the primary sources which are translated from either the original Sanskrit or from some other language like Pali. This difference is important because in the one case I am doing analysis of the original work and in the other I am analyzing the secondary source; both are of equal importance.

Of the types of Buddhisms, the Theravadin tradition is usually thought to most closely resemble the original teachings of the Buddha, Sakyamuni.[78] His teachings explain the concepts known as the Four Noble Truths. These are: "the noble truth of suffering", the noble truth of how suffering arises, the noble truth which explains the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth which details the way to attain that cessation, which is done through the use of The Eight-fold Path.[79] Through an understanding of these truths we will touch on the concepts that are important for this discussion.

To understand the basic tenets of Buddhism, however, it is best to begin with what is meant by the term 'individual' before diving into a discussion of these truths. Within the Buddhist tradition, the individual person is thought to be divided into five interrelated aggregates, or functional parts. Rahula defines these aggregates as the aggregate of matter, the aggregate of sensations, the aggregate of perceptions, the aggregate of mental formations, and the aggregate of consciousness.[80] These aggregates totally comprise the individual. There is nothing over and above them; this ultimately means that there is no human soul as it is usually thought of in the Western tradition. As Rahula writes, "[A]ccording to Buddhist philosophy there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered "Self" or "Soul" or "Ego" as opposed to matter."[81]

The lack of a soul also means that there is no permanent individual, as this concept is thought about in the Western tradition. The "soul" holds special significance for mainstream thinking in the Western world as that part of the individual that makes her "her". Buddhism is

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[78] The Buddhist tradition is large and diverse. As such, there are many different ways of understanding the concepts that will be discussed in the following pages. I will discuss only one tradition to avoid confusion and to better facilitate a comparison.

[79] Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taugh.* revised edition, foreword by Paul Demieville, collection of illustrative texts translated from the original Pali, (England: The Gordan Frasier Gallery Limited Bedford, 1967), 16.

[80] *Ibid,* 20-3.

[81] *Ibid,* 23.

much different in this regard, claiming that the individual exists but as a changing, non-static thing. This has implications for Buddhist agency. In the Western tradition, the permanent soul is that which gives the individual agency; the individual is seen as an agent because she does not change over time. There is something permanent we can refer to when we refer to her as a morally responsible agent. Within the Buddhist tradition, the agent is the totality of the five aggregates. The agent is an ever-changing thing that is conditioned by past experiences and by the world around her.

This lack of a permanent individual implies that consciousness is also dependent upon the physical conditions which give rise to it. Rahula attributes this argument to Sakyamuni Buddha by stating, "The Buddha declared in unequivocal terms that consciousness depends on matter, sensation, perception, and mental formations, and that it cannot exist independently of them."[82] As such, the "self" that individuals refer to is also subject to the law of cause and effect that is so very important within Buddhist doctrine. It is not only that consciousness is subject to causes and effects that makes this Buddhist theory so noteworthy, but also that consciousness cannot exist outside of Dependent Origination. This is much different from the Western view of the human agent as having the soul which might be influenced by outside sources but which somehow exists independently of them.

The aggregate of mental formations is particularly important because it includes volitional acts, whether they are good or bad.[83] These volitional acts are the starting point for the general discussion of Buddhist ethics. This discussion centers around the notion of *karma*. Dennis Hirota explains *karma* as the guiding force for the process of rebirth and death. The theory holds that individual volitional actions "possess the power of inevitable working their

[82]Sakyamuni Buddha as quoted by Rahula, (1967), 25.
[83] Rahula, (1967), 22.

consequences."[84] The agent's volitional actions in this life have consequences that are realized at some point in the future. These consequences also regulate the way in which a person will be reborn. For example, those who perform evil actions in this life will be reborn in a terrible state or will die quickly. More specifically, the early Buddhist tradition equates volitional actions with *karma.* Volitional actions are those which the agent chooses. Choosing these actions has inevitable consequences in her future. This is precisely what the theory of *karma* states. Thus, the two are the same. Furthermore, volition is '"mental construction, mental activity. Its function is to direct the mind in the sphere of good, bad, or neutral activities."'[85] In other words, volition is a mental activity that directs the mind in all ethical activities. Rahula states, volitional actions alone "can produce karmic effects."[86] These volitional acts are under the control of the agent. The agent can control her future by becoming aware of her *karmical* connections to her surroundings.

The First Noble Truth states that ordinary "life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain."[87] The word translated here as "suffering and pain" (*dukkha)* most fundamentally means "unsatisfactoriness". It more clearly implies anguish rather than physical pain. Every aspect of human existence is related in some way to suffering; humans get ill, grow old, and die. None of these things is pleasant and none of them avoidable. According to Rahula, there are three types of suffering: ordinary suffering, suffering produced by change, suffering produced by conditioned states. The first type of suffering includes things like birth and death. This second type of suffering is partially the result of the impermanence of the individual. The

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[84] Dennis Hirota, "Karman: Buddhist Concepts" in *Encyclopedia of Religion* ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. B, 2nd ed., (Detroit: Macmillian Reference, 2005), http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/ps/retrieve.do?resultListType=RELATED_DOCUMENT&sgHitCountType=None&inPS=true&prodId=GVRL&contentSegment=9780028659978&userGroupName=colu44332&docId=GALE|3424501698 (accessed January 31, 2007).

[85] Abhisamuc as quoted by Rahula, (1967), 22.

[86] *Ibid.*

[87] *Ibid*, 16.

third type of suffering is based on the agent's conception of herself as an individual that is composed of the five aggregates.[88]

According to the Theravadin tradition, the Second Noble Truth is the truth "of the arising or origin of *dukkha.*"[89] It states that suffering is caused by desire and greed, which is found throughout the individual's life. As Rahula says, "It is this…desire…that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings."[90] In other words, desire, and the attachment to the material world that stems from it, gives rise to *samsara*, which Rahula equates with the self-feeding cycle of birth-and-death.[91] The individual's attachment to the material world is based on a delusional desire to see ourselves as unchanging or even eternal individuals. When one attains Enlightenment, one destroys this delusion. To be free from s*amsara* is the Buddhist term for the continual cycle of life and death. The end of *samsara* is the goal of the Eight-fold Path, which is the subject of the Fourth Noble Truth.

The Third Noble Truth explains the goal of the Buddhist practitioner, the cessation of suffering and of *samsara*. To do this, the practitioner must eliminate thirst, which the Second Noble Truth tells us is the 'thirst' for the material world as expressed through things like desire and greed.[92] When this is attained, the practitioner is said to have achieved *nirvana*, which means "blowing out". The agent ceases to take part in the cycle of birth and death. She ceases to perform actions that have *karmic* results.[93] Thus, her *karma,* that is, the result of her previous voluntary actions, 'runs out.' As described in Buddhist literature, *nirvana* is the end of *samsara* but is also freedom from suffering—it is described both positively and negatively.[94] There are

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[88] *Ibid,* 19-20.
[89] *Ibid,* 29. Italics in original.
[90] *Ibid,* 29.
[91] *Ibid,* 27.
[92] *Ibid*, 35. Italics in original.
[93] Hirota, (2005). Italics in original.
[94] Rahula, (1967), 37-8.

no descriptions of what *nirvana* is like because it is beyond the ordinary concepts of human comprehension.

The Fourth Noble Truth describes the path that the individual takes to attain *nirvana*. It is usually called the Eight-Fold Path or the Middle Path. It consists of eight parts: correct understanding, correct thought, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness, and correct concentration. In following the Eight-fold Path, the Buddhist is to always strive for moderation and for a lifestyle that hurts as few creatures as possible. These two tenets outline the basic idea behind most of the premises listed above. This path is aimed at perfecting the individual's ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. Rahula writes

> According to Buddhism for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (*karuna)* on the one side and wisdom (*panna)* on the other…..If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect without feeling for others.[95]

These two qualities are the result of following the Eight-fold Path. According to Buddhism, it is important to focus on all aspects of the Eight-fold Path simultaneously so that both of these qualities develop at the same time.

The Buddha argued that all life is suffering and that the solution to such suffering is the Eight-fold Path. The culmination of the Eight-fold Path is the attainment of the wisdom that allows one to end *samsara*, the cycle of life and death; this wisdom is Enlightenment.[96] According to Pande, the Truth experienced during Enlightenment is divided into two parts: the theory of "Dependent Origination…elucidates the nature of reality" and "Quiescence (*nibbana)*…the absence of empirical nature, the realization of which leads to the cessation of the

[95] *Ibid*, 46. Italics in original.
[96] *Ibid,* 45.

stream of consciousness."[97] As an explanation of the physical world, the theory of Dependent Origination is central to the topic discussed throughout this thesis. Pande writes, "[The Theory of Dependent Origination] asserts that any object of experience depends for its existence or occurrence on the necessary and sufficient presence of its cause."[98] In other words, no actions occur that are not dependent in some way upon prior actions and present circumstances. Such logic seems to imply that human morality might not depend on the agent's responsibility. How is one to be held accountable for her actions if they are determined by prior actions? After a thorough examination of the theory itself, that question will be brought back up in the next chapter where it will be analyzed alongside the Western question of whether or not humans can be held responsible for their actions given the existence of an omniscient deity.

The Buddha's conception of causality as an explanation of the world was novel because he argued that causality actually existed in the world and was not simply a name that we apply to the connections we observe between events.[99] That is, causality exists outside of the human agent's ability to perceive it. In fact, he taught that this theory governed every aspect of the material world, including human existence. As mentioned, Buddhism argues that humans consist of nothing more than the five aggregates.[100] These aggregates are causally conditioned in the sense that the external objects cause sensation, which conditions the agent through the causal process. This process is considered 'perception' for the Buddha and was the ultimate cause of suffering. Kalupahana writes, "[T]his was a problem of prime importance because [the Buddha] realized that all the misery and unhappiness in the world were due to the evils associated with

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[97] Pande (1999), 372. Italics in original.
[98] *Ibid,* 371.
[99] David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, foreword by G.P. Malalasekera, (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 28.
[100] Rahula, (1967), 20-23.

sense perception."[101] Perception causes desire and obsession, which in turn cause the agent to become subjected to the physical world in order to fulfill those desires.[102] As Pande argues, the ego is viewed as real when one perceives the material world.[103] In other words, one thinks of oneself as being the observer of the events; the ego which interacts with the material world. This belief is faulty, though, because humans are not spiritual things that exist outside of the events and circumstances from which they are made.[104] This sense of self allows the agent to think of herself as having needs and desires that can only be attained through the material world. As Pande says, human suffering is based on "the illusion of substance."[105] The substance referred to her is the substance of her ego. The delusion that one is a permanent self is the illusion to which the statement alludes. These desires are the ones that the Buddha says must be eliminated, along with the sense of an ego, in order to attain Enlightenment.

Kalupahana's description of the causal process is sufficient to give a basic understanding of the way in which sense perception ultimately leads to suffering, but it is definitely not a total explanation. In order to more fully understand how such suffering arises from everyday interactions with the material world, one must examine the Buddha's Twelvefold Formula of Causation. It states:

> When this exists, that exists or comes to be; on the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist or come to be; on the cessation of this, that ceases. That is to say:
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> on ignorance depend dispositions;
> on dispositions depends consciousness;
> on consciousness depends the psychophysical personality;
> on the psychophysical personality depend the six 'gateways';
> on the six 'gateways' depends contact;
> on contact depends feeling [or sensation];

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[101] Kalupahana, (1975), 121.
[102] *Ibid,* 121-123.
[103] Pande, (1999), 375-76.
[104] Rahula, (1967).
[105] Pande, (1999), 375.

> on feeling depends craving;
> on craving depends grasping;
> on grasping depends becoming;
> on becoming depends birth;
> on birth depends aging and death.
> In this manner there arises this mass of suffering.[106]

This formula is the Buddhist attempt to describe in detail exactly how the individual is causally connected with the material world. Nothing that we typically associate with the ego is left out of this formulation. Furthermore, each of these connections attaches the individual to the material world.

Breaking the chain of causation allows one to end the cycle of *samsara*. To pick a point in the chain as an example, getting rid of ignorance is one way to end the cycle; ridding oneself of craving is another. This formula also intricately links the Buddha's Theory of Dependent Origination with human suffering; human suffering is the result of a causal series. This suffering is brought about through connection with the physical world, as detailed in the above passage. In addition, the becoming referred to is the becoming attached to the material world through the creation of the ego. In order to end suffering, one must disrupt the backward stretching chain of causal events.

The Buddha based this law of cause and effect on the theory of medicine prevalent during his lifetime. The medical theory began with the patient's outward symptoms and worked toward finding a 'first' cause for them by tracing back the immediate causes. In a similar way, the Buddha viewed human suffering as a disease that must be cured though tracing the symptoms back to their original cause. In developing a cure for this disease, he followed the four-stage theory of causation used by the medical community: detection of the symptoms, diagnosis,

[106] Kalupahana, (1975), 141.

therapy, and cure.[107] In keeping with this typology, the symptoms are the effects of suffering, the diagnosis equates the cause of these effects with suffering, the therapy is the Eightfold Path, and the cure is Enlightenment. Through this method the Buddha felt that all sentient beings could be cured of their suffering and the disease associated with the delusion that the self is a permanent entity.

[107] Pande (1999), 374.

Chapter 4: Free Will: A Comparison

Now that the theories within both traditions have been explained and analyzed, we can turn to a discussion of the concepts of free will as they are defined by both medieval Christianity and Theravadin Buddhism. The free will theories will be analyzed through the use of a modern theory.

Both the Christian and the Buddhist philosophers must deal with the concept of free will and its relation to human wrongdoing.[108] The Christian tradition must reconcile God's omniscience with human freedom in order to account for human sin in light of his omni-benevolence. The Buddhist tradition must reconcile free will with the Theory of Dependent Origination in order to retain the agent's moral responsibility in the face of what appears to be a fatalistic worldview. In both cases there must exist a theory or concept that brings the two sides of the problem together.

Specifically for the Christian tradition, remember that the underlying problem is the Problem of Evil. The rendering of it from earlier is fairly clear:

> 1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient, being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
> 2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
> 3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[109]

While the medieval theologians may phrase the problem as an attempt to understand humans as free creatures despite God's ability to foreknow all of their future acts, the underlying tension only exists because humans have the ability to sin. If humans did not sin, then there would be

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[108] The traditions do not have the same understanding of wrongdoing. The Christian tradition has the concept of sin found in its strongest place in the idea of Original Sin. The Buddhist tradition has no such conception. It acknowledges that humans can do immoral or wrong actions, but it does not have the Christian idea of sin that is inherent in the individual.

[109] Rowe, (1996), 2.

little motivation for a solution to the problem. That is, if humans did not have the ability to choose evil, then it would hardly matter if they acted freely. No one would bother to analyze the problem if humans chose to do the morally good thing without fail.

With regard to human free will, the Problem of Evil takes something like the following form: if God is omniscient and wholly good, why does he allow humans to freely choose to do evil? Is there not some way he, as an omnipotent being, could prevent them from sinning? This underlying question leads to the formulation of each of the theories in the previous section on medieval philosophy. The philosophers desired to absolve God from responsibility for the immoral behavior of the humans he created. The way to do this, so they thought, was to prove that it was possible for humans to have free will.

Before beginning a discussion of concept of free will, one has to examine the differing ways to interpret the idea of freedom. Kane identifies two different definitions of freedom; the compatibilist rendering of free will and the incompatibilist view. To restate Hasker's definition of compatibilism "*an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is true that the agent can perform the action if she decides to perform it and she can refrain from the action if she decides not to perform it."*[110] The agent is free to perform an action but that does not limit the amount to which her decision is influenced by prior actions. The agent's past actions might even completely determine which of the possible outcomes she will choose. This does not mean, though, that she did not choose the action.

The incompatibilist understanding of freedom maintains that "*an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent's power to perform the action and also in the agent's power to refrain from the action."*[111] The agent has the ability

[110] Hasker, (2002), 55. Italics in original.
[111] *Ibid.* Italics in original.

to perform an action and to not perform the same action in the same instant of time—both courses of action are equally plausible. This concept of free will is not compatible with any type of determinism. If it was, then the agent would not possibly for have the ability to both perform and to not perform an action.

With this basic understanding of freedom, it becomes clear that the Christian theologian typically relies on the compatibilist understanding. The theologian must advocate for that form of freedom that accommodates divine foreknowledge as a form of determinism; the theory must allow for events to occur as God knows they will without his actually causing them to occur. Divine foreknowledge is a form of determinism in the sense that events must correspond with God's knowledge. As already stated, omniscience implies infallibility—God cannot be wrong about the things he knows. If omniscience was not equated with determinism, then God could be wrong.

The Christian theologian could not argue for an incompatibilist theory of free will because doing so would prohibit him from asserting that God is omniscient. Incompatibilism assumes that the agent is the sole cause of her actions, leaving out any other factors that determine her eventual choice. God's perfect knowledge would be among those things which would cause the agent's actions and is not compatible with this notion of free will. It is possible for the Christian theologian to argue for this sort of freedom but must do so at the expense of divine omniscience; he would have to advocate for a creator god that was all-knowing; this seems to go against traditional Christian doctrine.

According to Kane, there are two compatibilist requirements for freedom: the agent's ability to do something whether or not it is actually done and that nothing prohibits the agent

from doing that which she wants to do.[112] The Christian theologians analyzed are able to meet both of these requirements. Within each of these philosophical systems, the agent has the physical and mental ability to perform action C or not to perform it. Also, by allowing the human agent the ability to act freely, God does not interfere with human choices. God can still foreknow future actions, but he does actively interfere with human choices. Under this interpretation of the underlying structure of the philosophical arguments studied, there is a distinction between divine foreknowledge and divine interference. As Augustine tries to argue, "if your foreknowledge is consistent with his freedom in sinning, so that you foreknow what someone else is going to do by his own will, then God forces no one to sin, even though he foresees those who are going to sin by their own will."[113] There needs to be the acceptance that God is able to know the agent's future activities without causing them to occur. As expected, none of the theologians discussed in the previous chapter advocate for divine interference because this would limit the freedom that they are all trying to guarantee. Additionally, they advocate for some knowledge on God's part which, nevertheless, does not compel future events or situations. In short, they tend to limit or modify God's knowledge rather than limiting human free will.

Molina's theory of middle knowledge provides an example solution to the problem arising between free will and divine omniscience. As noted, Molina argues that God has three types of knowledge: knowledge of those things that must be, knowledge of contingent things, and middle knowledge. Middle knowledge is that through which he knows "how free creatures are going to exercise their freedom."[114] This allows God to know the outcome of all possible

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[112] Kane (2005), 13.
[113] Augustine, (1993), 78.
[114] *Ibid,* 157.

situations for all possible agents without directly determining the actions of any of them.[115] Thus, the agent in this system directly meets the qualifications laid out by Kane for compatibilist theory; she is able to perform those actions that she wants to and nothing prohibits her from doing so.

By solving the tension resulting from the belief in free will and divine omniscience, the Christian theologians also solve the problem of evil as presented above. If it can be proven that sin is the result of human free action, then God is absolved of any direct responsibility for it. In other words, the human agent becomes responsible for her own actions and God remains omni-benevolent and omniscient without any apparent contradiction. It might be argued that God created the free willed humans who then chose to sin; Molina's theory is especially relevant for this criticism because he argues that God foreknows what humans will do in any situation and also creates the particular world in which such situations occur. However, Molina might respond by arguing that while God created the world, the human agents freely acted in a way that brought about the later circumstances; thus they are responsible for their actions and the affects of those actions. An argument similar to this could be made for all of the theories previously mentioned. The basic solution to the tension remains despite this argument; God cannot be held responsible for the actions of free beings even if he creates them because they freely chose to act immorally post creation.

In the last chapter I discussed the Buddhist Theory of Dependent Origination which asserts that any object of experience depends for its existence or occurrence on the necessary and sufficient presence of its cause."[116] The theory appears to be fatalistic, completely eliminating human freedom. I will argue that it does, in fact allow for free will. I also discussed this

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[115] *Ibid.*
[116] Pande, (1999), 371.

theory's implications for human morality. Specifically, it is difficult to understand how humans can be held responsible for actions which do not originate from their own will. As mentioned, the problem is:

1. The Theory of Dependent Origination exists.
2. The theory of Dependent Origination states that all present circumstances depend on their necessary and sufficient causes.
3. The human agent does some immoral act.
4. The human agent is not responsible for her actions because they are predetermined by some action which was also predetermined.

This problem is complicated by the Buddhist theory of *anatman,* or the theory of no soul.[117] *Anatman* is best characterized in this context as the lack of the Western concept of a permanent individual. Rahula explains this theory as, "[t]he Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul, or *Atman* within or without."[118] From a Western standpoint, the lack of a soul poses a problem because of the assumed connection between the permanent agent and moral responsibility. If the agent is impermanent or is not somehow distinct from the material world in which she lives, it seems difficult to assign blame to her for immoral actions (or praise if her actions are moral). The Western concept of free will is based on the agency of the individual; agency, in turn, is attributed to the individual because of her assumed permanence, which is expressed through the notion of a soul.

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[117] *Atman* refers to the 'soul' while *an* is the negative prefix. Here I am loosely using the word 'soul' to mean something like unchanging, permanent self. *Atman* is something similar to this but encompasses more than this at the same time.

[118] Walpola, (1967), 39. Italics in original.

Buddhism addresses the concept of free will through its affirmation that the individual is comprised of nothing other than the five aggregates; all aspects of a person are subsumed within these functions.[119] Rather than arguing that there is a distinction between the soul and the body, as do dualist philosophers, Buddhism claims that no such distinction exists. This does not entail the denial of the existence of an individual in the colloquial sense of the word, as a thing that can be identified with a given name in a way that nothing else can. It simply means that Buddhism does not attribute a metaphysical, permanent existence to the thing labeled the individual. In short, the medieval philosophers believed that the agent was a permanent individual while the Buddhists claim that nothing in the material world is permanent in this way—everything is constantly changing within this system.

If one accepts the Buddhist rendering of the individual as sufficient for assigning moral responsibility, then we can move to an examination of morality's relation to the theory of Dependent Origination. According to the formulation of the problem above, the Buddhist understanding of the theory of Dependent Origination causes tension between the concept of free will and the concept of determinism because it is assumed that free actions are undetermined actions. This is the same problem that the modern incompatibilist identifies. Kane states the problem clearly

> An event (such as a choice or action) is *determined* when there are conditions obtaining earlier (such as the decrees of fate or the foreordaining acts of God or antecedent causes plus laws of nature) whose occurrence is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of the event. In other words, it *must* be the case that, *if* earlier determining conditions obtain, then the event will occur.[120]

If there are conditions in the past that sufficiently determine the present event, then it seems—according to this definition, as though free will cannot exist. The basic formulation of the

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[119] *Ibid,* 20-23.
[120] Kane, (2005), 5-6. Italics in original.

problem with regard to the Buddhist philosophy specifically states that because the individual is comprised of the five aggregates which are causally determined, meaning that the individual is causally determined. If the individual is causally determined, then free will cannot exist.

The Buddhist understanding of human agency is not this fatalistic. Through its understanding of *karma*, Theravadin Buddhism allows for agent responsibility. Before moving to a discussion of *karma*, I first want to identify those things which originate causally and what the Buddhist understanding of the will is. According to Kalupahana, there are five spheres in which causality operates: "(1) physical (inorganic) order… (2) physical (organic) order…psychological order…(4) moral order…and (5) ideal spiritual order."[121] The next step involves defining what the will is within the Theravadin tradition. Kalupahana states that "[t]here is no one single term in the Buddhist texts that could be considered the equivalent of the term *will*. This means that the so-called will is not one single controlling force, but rather a whole group of tendencies."[122] These tendencies are related to the five aggregates discussed above. Here is it important to note that the will is correlated with the idea of agency. In other words, the will is that which comprises the Buddhist agent.[123]

Additionally, Kalupahana argues that volition, or will, "is the most important factor in determining whether a person is responsible or not for an action."[124] (Remember that the concept of *karma* is defined as volitional action.) If volition is present in a person's actions, then the person is to be held responsible; if it is not present than there is no moral responsibility. Volition corresponds with immediate decisions to act. However, there may be instances where there is no obvious volition but the agent is still morally responsible. These situations are

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[121] Kalupahana, (1976), 30.
[122] David J. Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism,* (Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1995), 49.
[123] The will and the soul seem to be interrelated in the Buddhist tradition as they are in the Christian one. The same things are responsible for giving the individual agency and for giving her her 'individualness'.
[124] Kalupahana, (1995), 52.

governed by the dispositions which "represent the gradually built up character involved in decision making."[125] Dispositions constitute the individual by "processing the personality, that is, giving form, guiding or directing, setting up goals, and trying to achieve them."[126] These dispositions are equal to the tendencies discussed in the previous paragraph. The Western tradition has a similar idea only these traits are generally referred to as societal conditionings, environmental conditionings, etc.

Karma, as a theory, refers to the Buddhist doctrine of moral behavior. Thus, ethical actions are those which produce *karmic* results. Additionally, those actions which are deemed moral or immoral are those which are volitional. To review, Kalupahana cites the *Cula-kammavibhanga-sutta* on this matter "which maintains that a person who kills living creatures or has no compassion for them will, because of that behavior, be reborn in an evil state. If he were not reborn in an evil state, and if he returned to life as a human, … he would be short-lived."[127]

Kalupahana points to several causes of free will, further clarifying the distinctions that he makes between the different types of volitional actions. Among them are outside sources, what are commonly known as instincts, internal motivations which are consciously known to the agent, and internal motivations which are not consciously known to the agent.[128] The external motivations provide an explanation of human "behavior in terms of a stimulus-response sort of model."[129] The internal conscious motivations include feelings of attachment and desire. Internal unconscious motivations include desires like the desire to avoid death.[130] Moral responsibility applies only to internal motivations for human behavior. Of them, agents are

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[125] *Ibid,* 52.
[126] *Ibid,* 51.
[127] *Ibid,* 128.
[128] Kalupahana(1976), 46-47.
[129] *Ibid,* 47.
[130] *Ibid.*

responsible for their conscious motivations because they are caused by the agent's own desires. Agents are also responsible for those actions resulting from unconscious motivations because they are based on a "mistaken understanding of the nature of human existence."[131] This explanation relies on the Buddhist understanding of the agent's attachment to the world as one of delusion and faulty desire. The Eight-fold Path leads the agent to liberation from this suffering and to a wisdom that releases her from her delusional desires.

The Western philosophical community tends to not hold agents responsible for unconscious motivations like the desire to avoid death. This type of motivation is usually categorized under the survival instinct or something equivalent. The Western tradition does agree, though, that individuals should be held accountable for consciously motivated actions; these are the actions that are categorized as moral or immoral.

Because the concept of will is included as a causally determined thing, Buddhist doctrine is careful to state that there are causes of human behavior that are outside of the agent's volitional actions. However, the agent is still considered to have freedom. In order to compensate for the notion of freedom, Buddhism states that while human action is determined by causes "it is followed by the correlated consequences."[132] This means that the causes do not strictly determine the effects. As Kalupahana understands the Buddha's teachings, causation is only a probability when human psychological tendencies are included in the discussion.[133] The agent's prior actions are sufficient to determine her future actions but are not necessary. In short, the Buddhist allows for free will by stating that the agent affects her outcome in a meaningful way. She causes her future circumstances. The Buddhist argues that the inclusion of mental

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[131] *Ibid,* 47.
[132] Kalupahana, (1975), 128.
[133] *Ibid,* 123.

capabilities is essential because morality does not function if the agent is not blameworthy.[134] If the agent is not responsible for her actions, then it makes no sense to talk about morality and justice.

Both traditions want to claim that the individual is free with respect to volitional actions. However, both must argue for this from within a deterministic framework. To make this argument, both traditions posit that humans have free will as one of their basic assumptions. This is interesting because neither attempts to prove, or even discuss the reasons for, this incredibly important assumption. Whether or not the possession of free will is something that one can prove, I note this similarity to point out that both traditions alter their other beliefs rather than discarding human freedom.

This understanding of free will is similar to the Causal Theory of Action described by Kane. According to him, this theory agrees with the Agent Causal Theory which holds that beliefs, intentions, and other similar reasons are true causes of action.[135] This allows for the agent to be a determining factor in her own future rather than simply a pawn being driven by deterministic forces outside of herself. In addition, the Causal Theory of Action argues that these reasons are themselves the products of prior events or reasons. Kane writes, "causal theorists of action argue that the agent-causal structure of action *can* be explained in terms of causation by prior *events* or *states of affairs.*"[136]

According to the Buddhist theory of determinism, the agent present circumstances are determined by prior events; this includes her reasons, desires, and choices. These mental formations are one aspect of the five aggregates, which are all part of the causally determined

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[134] *Ibid,* 123.
[135] Kane, (2005), 61.
[136] *Ibid.* Italics in original.

network.[137] In addition, Kane argues that reasons and decisions may be causes of agent actions but this does not entail that such causes necessarily lead to any given action because the agent's will must be taken into account. The Theravadin tradition leaves open the possibility that the agent can affect her future circumstances and determine the *karma* that she accrues through her volitional actions. In fact, Kalupahana argues that causation must be viewed as probabilistic when mental attributes are taken into account.[138] This corresponds to Kane's understanding of the Causal Theory of action. He states that "[s]ome causes are merely probabilistic; they make it more likely that certain events will occur without determining that those events will occur."[139] Thus, it seems that this Buddhist theory is at least partially explained by a modern, Western theory.

If the agent's decisions and choices are part of the causes for her actions, then she can be held responsible for those actions which have immoral consequences. This rendering of the solution to the problem between the Theory of Dependent Origination and free will draws parallels between the Buddhist and Christian doctrines. The Christian philosopher also wants to argue that the agent's reasons and decisions are causes of her actions. This is the only way for the agent to retain moral responsibility and thus absolve the omniscient God. In order to argue for a theory which places the entire moral burden on the human agent, the philosopher must demonstrate that the agent's free will actually causes the good or bad consequences that result from it. As Kane says, "[I]f actions were not caused by our characters and motives, we could not be held responsible for the actions. They would not be *our* actions."[140] If the agent's choices were not the causes of her actions, then the effects would result from sources that were not under

[137] Kalupahana, (1975), 128.
[138] *Ibid,* 123.
[139] Kane, (2005), 61.
[140] *Ibid,* 18.

her control. The agent's actions would be caused by her circumstances. If those circumstances were created by another thing, then that thing would be responsible for her actions. Thus, if God created the world and the situation leading to the one in which she exists at any given moment, then he would be responsible for her actions. This would run contrary to the intended outcome of each of the theories set forth. The only way to avoid this problem is to postulate that her will plays a direct part in the outcome. Thus, the Christian theologian needs to accept some version of the Agent Causal Theory.

Whether or not the Christian theologian accepts the Causal Theory of Action with its additional premise that the agent's decisions are determined by prior decisions or circumstances is open for debate. It seems that the Christian theologian would want to argue that the agent's decisions were based on prior occurrences. If this were not the case, then the theologian would have difficulties explaining why the agent's thoughts and actions were not arbitrary. If the thoughts of the agent are not caused by prior occurrences, then they are indeterminate. This concept has some serious consequences for the free will theorist. Kane makes several arguments to this effect. First, he states that the undetermined action is not one that is within the agent's control; the action occurs spontaneously.[141] If applied to the mental realm, this would mean that the agent's thoughts and decisions to perform an action are not within her control. Secondly, these undetermined events would actually hurt the individual's freedom because she would have no control over them. He gives the example of cutting a piece of cloth when your arm twinges, causing you to make a mistake. This uncaused action actually impedes your progress.[142] One can imagine a situation in which the agent has uncaused thoughts and other mental processes. The agent's decisions would in no way reflect her thought process. Additionally, have a series of

[141] *Ibid,* 35.
[142] *Ibid.*

connected thoughts would be impossible because the previous thoughts would not cause the latter ones. Finally, he argues that "if choices or actions are undetermined, the may occur otherwise, *given exactly the same past and laws of nature."*[143] Thus, the agent could have exactly the same upbringing and experiences as, say, her identical twin. But, when faced with the same question, the two make different decisions. This appears contrary to the way in which we normally understand our thought process to work.[144] Thus, it seems that the Christian theologian wants to advocate for the stronger Causal Theory of Action.

If we except the proofs presented by each tradition as sufficient to prove that free will is compatible with some sort of determinism, then the problems set forth in the introduction are also solved. God is absolved from responsibility for human sin and the Theory of Dependent Origination allows the agent to be responsible for her actions.

[143] *Ibid,* 35. Italics in original.

[144] We must assume that the twins are exactly the same. There can be no differences in experiences for the thought experiment to work.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Both Christian theology and Buddhist doctrine hold that the individual has agency[145] and a free will that is more like a conditioned will.[146] For the Christian, this is necessary for her understanding of morality as somehow intimately connected with the agency of the individual. For the Buddhist, the concept of free will is also connected with the *karmic* theory which defines morality within this system. The Buddhist agent is the producer of volitional actions which influence the future state of affairs.

As mentioned previously, the Christian theologian relies on a compatibilist understanding of free will in order to reconcile divine omniscience and free will. The Buddhist theorist must also rely on this interpretation of human freedom. In this sense the Theory of Dependent Origination functions very much like God's omniscience. Just as God foreknows what will happen in the future, the Theory of Dependent Origination states that the future is determined by the volitional acts of the present.

There is much debate about whether or not the theories examined in this thesis actually solve the Problem of Evil and the tension between complete determinism and free will. As we saw in the second chapter, there are problems and conflicts associated with each of the theories presented. None of them provides an adequate solution to why God is not responsible for the actions of humans. The philosophical tradition is filled with critiques and modifications of this theory. Further exploration of the modern scholarship on the subject is required to determine whether or not the question is answerable. However, given the above argumentation, it looks as

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[145] While the Christian tradition allows for the idea of an agent, the Buddhist tradition does not. Because of its understanding of the individual as comprised of the skandas, the individual is granted agency but not the label of agent. This is due to volition being only one portion of the skandas that make up the entire individual.

[146] Given the idea of compatibilism, free will, in the colloquial sense, does not exist. What does exist, though, is an agency that is conditioned in a way that allows the individual a volition that is conditioned by previous actions. I will continue to refer to this notion as free will, but the reader should keep this distinction in mind.

though the tension will always remain. This tension is especially problematic because of divine omniscience. Unlike the Buddhist, Christians must reconcile this perfected knowledge with their ability to do something which God did not, and could not, plan. This means that their task is most difficult.

For the Buddhist, the compatibilist account of free will appears to have solved the tension between the Theory of Dependent Origination and human free will. If it is possible for the agent to act freely within a deterministic framework, then the problem is gone. However, it could be argued that the compatibilist definition of free will does not work. Perhaps one favors the incompatibilist definition. If this is true, then the proponent of the incompatibilist framework must deal with the problems raised by Kane.

The goal of this thesis was the comparison of one aspect found within both traditions. It was important because comparison allows for new insights into both religions being discussed as well as a broader basis for understanding one's own tradition. Further comparison between the two religions might demonstrate that they are not as radically different as scholarship currently treats them. This is not to say, though, that either tradition is less significant or should be analyzed in terms of the other. Both have unique and meaningful aspects that should be brought to the table for discussion.

This thesis opened up questions about the nature of agency in both traditions. Both traditions have very different understandings of what constitutes the individual's relation to volition. With the Christian tradition, the individual is viewed as the agent who performs the various actions. The Buddhist tradition perceives the individual as a collection of *skandas* that are causally related to each other and to the external world. Volition is one aspect of the *skandas* but does not warrant much attention with the Buddhist tradition.

The exploration of the idea of agency will also highlight each tradition's view of morality with regard to the agent. As noted, the traditions have vastly different views of human wrongdoing, and it is my belief that exploring the concepts of agency will bring more clarity to the rationale behind their differing definitions. This research will have to look at the primary sources of both Christians and Buddhists as well as comparing the different words used by each tradition to refer to similar concepts. This latter aspect of the research is very helpful because the words used to refer to similar ideas in different traditions are often translated in vastly different ways and carry different connotations.

Further research into the nature of agency will open up new ways of thinking about it within both traditions. The comparison will allow the scholar to ponder the question of what individuality and its relation to the actions that individuals perform. Such scholarship is important in both the comparative literature and the philosophy fields of research.

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